



Food Justice Project

Mapping Peasant Farmers Organizations And Needs



6th October 2015

Machakos

Table of Contents

Item	Page No.
Background	3
What is Fahamu's Interest in Peasant farmers?	3
Issues affecting farmers in Machakos	4-10
What are the farmers' needs?	11
Moving forward	12

Background

Machakos County lies 66kms from Nairobi and is divided into 8 constituencies namely: Machakos town, Mavoko, Masinga, Yatta, Kangundo, Kathiani, Matungulu and Kangundo. The main economic activity is agricultural production, the climate is semi arid and the terrain is hilly.

The Mapping farmers organizations and needs meeting was hosted by Machakos Small Scale Farmers Association which is a member of the East Africa Small Holder Farmers Association. The aim of the group is to harness small holder farmers to improve productivity as well as improve the economic status of farmers through collective marketing of farm produce. The meeting brought together a minimum of 20 participants (10 females: 10 males).

The meeting aimed at understanding farming processes amongst the Machakos Small Scale Farmers Association, identify the various challenges facing the farming community including how they have organized to counter the challenges, chart a way forward on how to partner with Fahamu to advance food justice.

What is Fahamu's Interest in Peasant Farmers?

Fahamu was shared as an organization concerned about various social injustices meted on communities. Specific for farmers, Fahamu's work in West Africa through the We are the Solution (WAS) was pointed out as to be the foundation in that farmers not only in Africa but in developing countries in Latin America and Asia were going through the same oppressions. These injustices included forced evictions from own land, reduced productivity as a result of climate change and control of peasant food system through seed control.

It was also shared that Fahamu through working with farmers in West Africa had realized that smallholder farmers were the ones feeding the world.

Issues affecting farmers in Machakos

Issues affecting the farmers were broadly shared as market access, GMOs, lack of farmers voice in decision making at the county level, inaccessibility to up to date information on agriculture and lack of agricultural inputs .The deliberations were as follows:

Land

The farmers shared that each farmer had their own land with the major reason for their engagement in agriculture being that they were previously being exploited by traders hence came together to be able to control the prices of their produce and carry out collective marketing.

It was further pointed out that the

group's farming is

based on Food

First principle

which is

anchored

on the

philosophy

that the

farmer and his

household must feed well

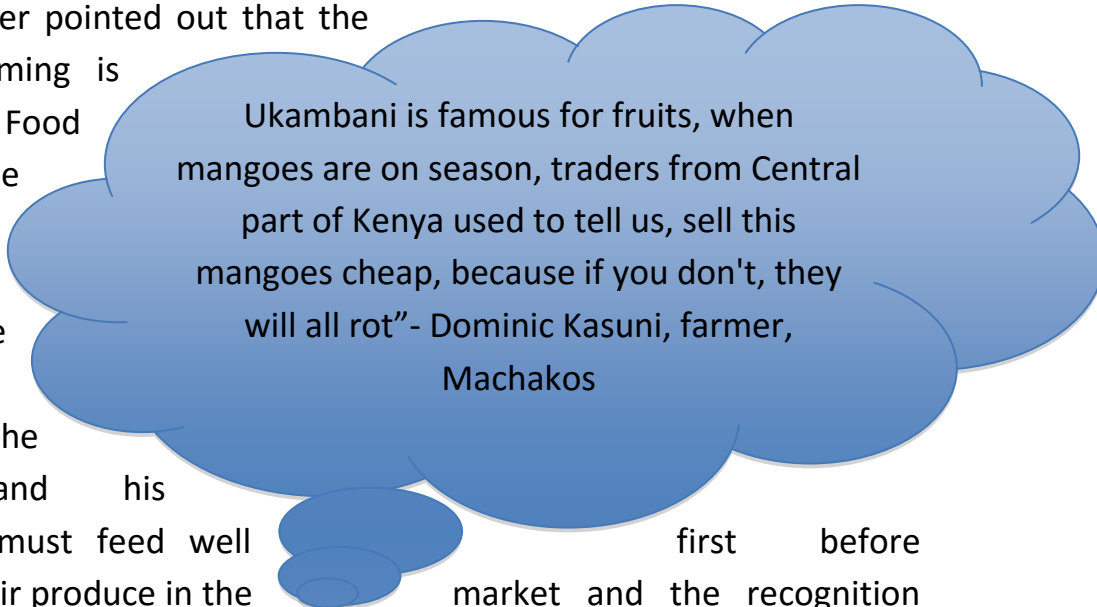
they sell their produce in the

that without food there is no life. It was remarked that the group is

trying to change the stereotype that has often associated Ukambani

with hunger and relief food and create a new image of a community

capable of producing its own food.



Ukambani is famous for fruits, when mangoes are on season, traders from Central part of Kenya used to tell us, sell this mangoes cheap, because if you don't, they will all rot"- Dominic Kasuni, farmer, Machakos

Seeds

It was shared that the community had its own system of seeds sharing

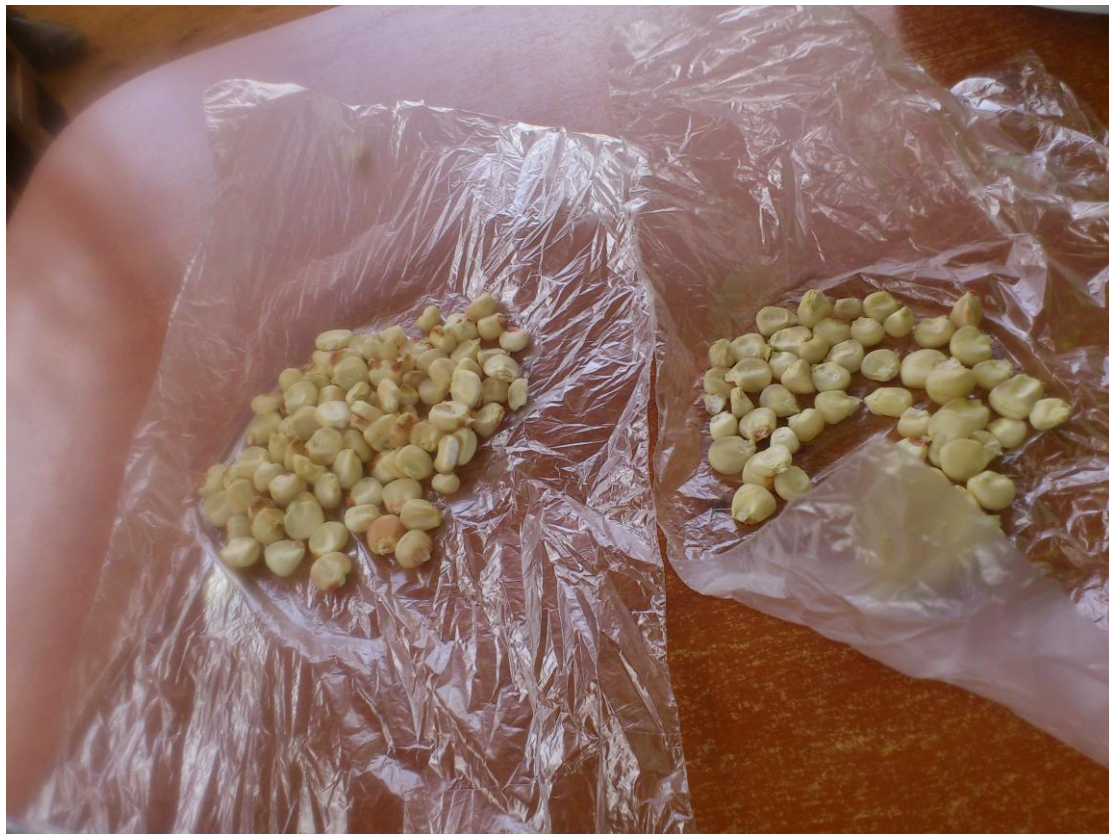
and that in the Akamba culture it was taboo to refuse to give one's

neighbour seeds. It was further shared that in case a mother could not

till her land due to advanced pregnancy or any other reason, the other

community members would collectively till her land to enable her have a food during the harvest season.

The members remarked that comparing their indigenous seeds and those they were buying from the agrovets, the indigenous seeds could be replanted year after year and that the indigenous seeds fitted well with their *muthokoyi*¹, which is made from pounded maize. They further commented that if they use non-indigenous seeds, it affects preparation of muthokoyi.



Indigenous seeds

vs.

Hybrid seeds

The group shared that they purchase their seeds from DuPont Pioneer and Monsanto which are the major seed companies in the area, they also shared that sometime back, they got seeds from the county government which were expired and hence they did not have yields.

Criminalization of indigenous seeds was discussed as to originate from the Crops Act 2013, which introduced the concept that seeds could only

¹ Muthokoyi is traditional Kamba food made from maize meal

be bought from certified distributors. The farmers noted that this would adversely affect them as they depended on seed sharing although they commented that they did not have a seed banking system existing within the community.

Fertilizers

The farmers shared that fertilizers is bought from agrovets, although very few of them undertook mulching .The group remarked that the costs of fertilizers were going up and that this was affecting them.



Deliberations on access to farm inputs

Decision making at county levels and farmers

It was shared that the level of involvement of farmers in the agricultural sector is very minimal and that projects are imposed on the farmers. For instance it was shared that the county government of Machakos had been allocated 10.5 billion in the 2014/15 budget, the bulk of which was to go to Agriculture, however, nothing much had been done except to buy 40 tractors.

It was remarked that the tractors were to be used to till the farmers land, but the farmers cited exclusion in that the tractors were only tilling land for affluent farmers with huge acreage and those whose lands were flat surfaced, for farmers whose land was hilly, nothing was done for them.



Discussing challenges facing farmers in Machakos

Peasant farmers and natural disasters

Asked how prepared they were in the advent of a natural disaster, the farmers shared that they are confused and that the information they have is that there will be an Elnino lasting for three months but there were no preparations as yet by the county government especially with regard to farmers.

GMOs

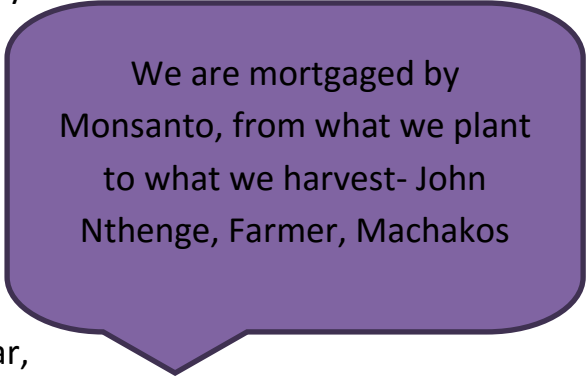
The farmers shared that they did not fully understand the issue of GMOs and wanted

As farmers, we are very worried about Elnino as we have very little information-Onesmus Kioko, Chairperson, and Machakos Small Scale Farmers Association

clarification .It was shared that GMO is the process where the gene of either a plant or insect or a bacteria is altered, in a laboratory to come up with a new organism. On maize, it was shared that a gene of maize was put together with a gene of stock borer, which is a pest to make the maize become pest resistant.

It was mentioned that many organizations including farmers and consumers had come together to demonstrate against lifting of the GM ban by Vice President William Ruto. Reasons for these demonstrations were cited as linkages that have been made between GMOs and rising cases of cancer, effects GMOs on reproductive health among women, health dangers associated with GMOs given that in Kenya we eat maize as a staple food (primary consumers) in our Ugali as porridge etc. hence if the maize is GMO maize then the amount of toxins going directly into the body is higher and was responsible for the rising cases of cancer in the country.

The concept of gene terminator was also explained in response to the farmers concerns that some seeds they buy from the agrovets end up yielding nothing .It was noted that when GMOs seeds are being produced, a terminator gene is inserted and when this gene dies, the crop can not reproduce and that was why the farmers had to buy seeds year after year, this was further described as the corporate capture of our food system where companies producing seeds enslave farmers while at the same time the companies are reaping mega profits.



We are mortgaged by Monsanto, from what we plant to what we harvest- John Nthenge, Farmer, Machakos

Politicization of hunger and water

The group shared that Ukambani area has been associated with perennial hunger and that in the 1990s; a member of the community due to prolonged hunger consumed a dog. This was in part the reason for the group's coming together to ensure all members had food .It was further shared that hunger in the area is being used by politicians to

either get to power or remain in power with promises that they will provide water to the community.

The farmers shared that due to politicization of water, areas deemed opposing the current political class are provided with a steady supply of water to stem political dissent and that there is non- prioritization of projects especially those that are linked to agriculture.



Discussions on politicization of hunger and water in Ukambani²

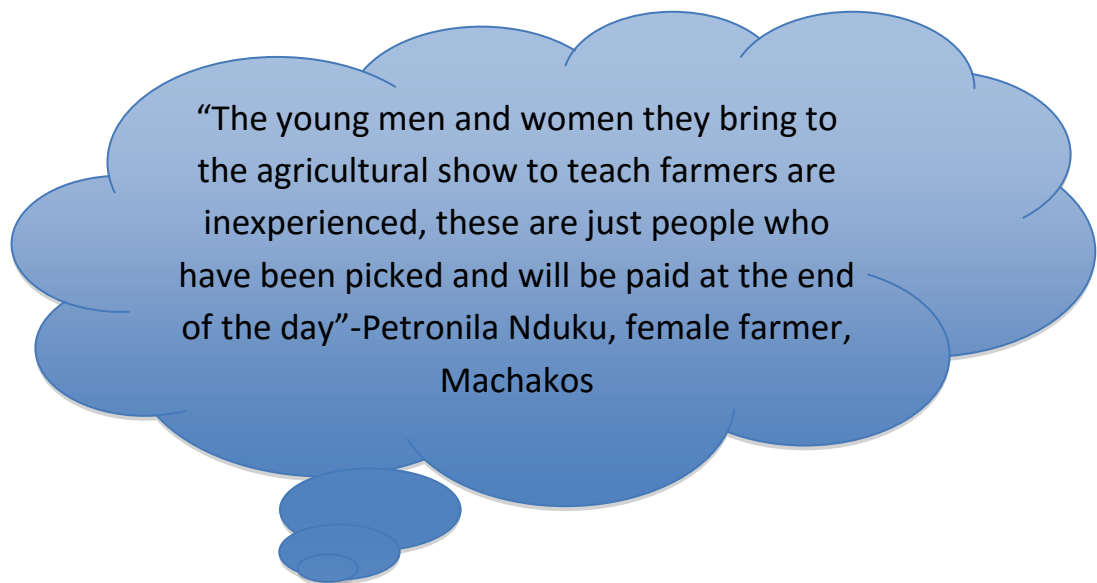
Access to information from the county

It was shared that there is very scant information on agriculture coming from the county level and that in case farmers are called to meetings, these meetings either exclude the bulk of farmers or its only progressive farmers who own large tracts of land who get invited.

The agricultural show was also cited as a source of information, however the farmers commented that the people brought to sensitize farmers on

² The land constituting of Makeni, Kitui and Machakos parts of Eastern Kenya

various agricultural issues are not well versed and it's the farmers who end up teaching them.



What are the farmers' Needs?

Members of Machakos District Small Holder Farmers Association shared the following as their needs:

- ◆ Information on emerging issues as they relate to agriculture
- ◆ Training to better understand GMOs
- ◆ Indepth awareness creation to enable understanding of the Crops Act and other pieces of legislation that have adverse impacts on farmers
- ◆ Indepth training on soil fertility and how its affected by fertilizers
- ◆ Trainings on issues of market and market control



Deliberations on farmers' needs

Moving forward

The following were the agreed upon issues

- ◆ Fahamu to organize a training for the farmers on issues of food sovereignty as well as the technical aspects of crop production
- ◆ Sharing of information with the farmers in relation to agro-ecology
- ◆ Provision of opportunities for farmer to farmer learning and sharing (linking farmers in Gatundu with farmers from Machakos)
- ◆ Organize a demonstration on GMOs in the county
- ◆ Fahamu to provide support when the farmers wish to present their issues to the county government e.g. petitions